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ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION OF UKRAINE

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Abstract. In the article, the issue of implementation of international and national legal documents in the field of inclusive education in the activities of higher educational establishments by the example of Lviv Polytechnic National University is considered. The current legal framework is viewed as a basis for creating equal educational opportunities for people with disabilities in the system of university education. The prerequisites for the establishment of “No Limits” Services of Accessibility to Learning Opportunities at Lviv Polytechnic, as developed on the basis of advanced international scientific and practical experiences in the areas of education, social work, health and disability studies, are revealed. The objectives of the Lviv Polytechnic policy in inclusive education, with its implementation resulted in the development of a system of inclusive educational services at the University, are identified. The features of the application of the information technology as a powerful tool for inclusion and transformation of the individual, academic and social environments to meet the needs of a disabled person are highlighted. The prospects of further development of the system of inclusive educational services as a mechanism for the implementation of inclusive education policy in higher education are determined.

Key words: *inclusive education policy, international and national legal documents, social work, health, disability studies, accessibility services, system of inclusive educational services, mechanism for policy implementation*

Анотація. У статті розглянуто проблему імплементації міжнародних та вітчизняних правових документів у сфері інклюзивної освіти в досвіді освітньої діяльності вищих навчальних закладів на прикладі Національного університету «Львівська політехніка». Існуюча законодавча база визначається як основа для створення рівних можливостей навчання в системі університетської освіти для людей з інвалідністю. Виявлено передумови створення у Львівській політехніці Служби доступності до можливостей навчання «Без обмежень», сформовані з урахуванням передового міжнародного науково-практичного досвіду у галузях освіти, соціальної роботи, здоров'єзбереження, вивчення питань інвалідності. Визначено цілі політики

Львівської політехніки у сфері інклюзивної освіти, результатом реалізації якої стало формування системи надання інклюзивних освітніх послуг в університеті. Виокремлено особливості використання інформаційних технологій як потужного засобу інклюзії та трансформації особистісного, академічного та суспільного середовища для задоволення потреб людини з інвалідністю. Визначено перспективи подальшого розвитку системи надання інклюзивних освітніх послуг як механізму імплементації інклюзивної освітньої політики у вищій школі.

***Ключові слова:** інклюзивна освітня політика, міжнародні та вітчизняні правові документи, соціальна робота, здоров'єзбереження, вивчення питань інвалідності, служба доступності, система надання інклюзивних освітніх послуг, механізм імплементації політики*

Introduction. Over the last decade, the social and education policies for children and youth with disabilities in Ukraine as influenced by the development of civil society have undergone significant changes. Public perception of this group of people has changed apart from the concepts of a “patient” and a “ward” in specialized residential care to realize that these people are full-fledged members of society. Concurrently the process of implementation of inclusive education at pre-school, school and higher educational institutions has begun. Education of persons with special needs is closely related to the process of their socialization throughout life, therefore education of children and youth with disabilities jointly with other people has a significant impact on their future social activities and integration into society. However, just the enrolment of people with disabilities by educational establishments does not guarantee these people equal access to quality education as some of them may have specific educational needs, which are not always addressed in school. Consequently, to ensure equal educational opportunities for persons with disabilities and their full inclusion in the educational process a complex of inclusive actions at all levels of education – from preschool to higher education is to be introduced.

The studies of the issues of implementation of inclusive education at secondary schools involved Ukrainian scholars in the areas of education (M. Zakharchuk, A. Kolupayeva, M. Svarnyk, N. Sophii, and M. Shved); providing educational support for children with special needs (S. Bader, O. Vasylenko, K. Ostrovs'ka, V. Shpak, and T. Falasenidi); defining ways of transforming secondary schools into inclusive ones (S. Yephimova, Y. Naida, and Y. Rybak); and identifying theoretical and methodical fundamentals of NGOs' activities in implementing inclusive education (I. Bohdanova, T. Vinogradova, R. Kraplich, L. Klimanska, D. Pushkariov, O. Sophii, and O. Fert).

The problem statement. Modern science and practice in the fields of education, social work, health and disability studies pose new challenges to inclusive education with regard to transformation

of educational institutions in order to meet a wide range of educational, informational and social needs of the disabled. The analysis of national studies in this area has exhibited the lack of a comprehensive and in-depth consideration of the issues of implementation of inclusive education policy in higher education.

The goal and objectives of the article. The goal of the article is to justify the concept of the development of “No Limits” Services of Accessibility to Learning Opportunities at Lviv Polytechnic National University on the way of implementation of inclusive education policy in the system of university education. The authors focus on the objectives of analysing the legal framework at the international, national and local levels as the basis for creating equal learning opportunities in higher education for people with disabilities; revealing the background of the establishment of “No Limits” Accessibility Services at Lviv Polytechnic; and defining a conceptual framework and features of the implementation of inclusive education policy in higher education by the example of Lviv Polytechnic, including the highlighting of specific application of information technologies as a means of inclusion.

The main body. Changing the paradigm of education for persons with disabilities is defined by Ukraine’s ratification in 1991 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child proclaiming the right to education on the basis of equal opportunities, and confirmed in 2009 by the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in which the right of people with disabilities to education without discrimination on the basis of equality of opportunities for inclusive education at all levels of lifelong learning is emphasized [4, 5]. These international legal documents put forward requirements for each state, including Ukraine, on bringing the national legislation into line with these international legal instruments.

In Art. 53 of the Constitution of Ukraine, the right to education in the country is declared the following way: “The state ensures accessible and free pre-school, complete general secondary, vocational and higher education at state and communal educational establishments” [6]. The right of everyone to education is guaranteed by the laws of Ukraine, including the laws “On Education”, “On General Secondary Education”, “On Higher Education”, and “On the Amendments to Some Laws of Ukraine on the Organization of Inclusive Education”; the orders of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “On the Approval of the Concept of the Development of Inclusive Education”, “On the Approval of the Regulations on Specialized Classes for Children with Special Educational Needs at Secondary Schools”, “On the Approval of the Action Plan to Ensure the Right to Education of Children with Special Educational Needs, Including Children with Disabilities” and other legal acts, explaining the features and opportunities to ensure free education for children and young people regardless of their health status and disability at all public schools irrespective of the accreditation level [8]. It is indicated that the state educational standards, mandatory for all students, regardless of their health status are the basis of higher education. However, in spite of the significant legislative

elaboration of the issue of the provision of educational services in Ukraine at the levels of primary and secondary education, in the above laws and regulations the ways of performing the existing legal documents in the sphere of inclusive education policy in activities of higher educational institutions are not specified.

Therefore institutions of higher education, Lviv Polytechnic in particular, are faced with an important task of the development and approval of necessary university-wide regulations for the establishment of a mechanism of implementation of inclusive education policy under conditions of a higher school.

In response to the challenges and needs of Ukrainian society, according to the principle of social inclusion, as a reaction to the needs of persons with disabilities, and given the social importance and practical need for social work education and development of social services, the “University – Community” system of social work education is established on the basis of Lviv Polytechnic National University. This educational system is the result of the implementation of the well-known “*Reforming Social Services: Canada-Ukraine Project* (1999-2003), funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), in partnership with the Faculty of Social Work of the University of Manitoba and the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (Winnipeg, Canada). The four-year project consisted of the two main components: an educational component in social work and a disability component. The development of these project areas has produced a significant impact on policy reforms in the development of services for persons with disabilities and their involvement in active social life, including education [9]. The “University – Community” system of social work education, policy reforms and their implementation at Lviv Polytechnic National University have been strongly supported and contributed to due to the international partnership as being actively developed over the recent two years in the areas of accessibility and inclusive sports, health and education in cooperation with the Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg, Germany.

The “University – Community” system of social work education established at Lviv Polytechnic projects advanced international experiences in educating social work professionals onto Ukrainian soil with due regard to local peculiarities. The philosophical foundations of the initiative are the values embodied in the profession of social work, the application of the ecosystem approach and the vision of a human being in the environment, the emphasis on the strength perspective and client empowerment, the development of a socially active professional, the integration of theory and practice, the understanding of social work practice in the context of social policy, and the ongoing development of partnership relationships between the university and governmental and non-governmental social service agencies. Social work activities are based on the ideology of health promotion and health caring. In understanding health and its role in improving health of individuals, families, groups and communities social work promotes the holistic, bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach, focusing on particular attention to people with disabilities [3, cc. 16, 55; 7].

Social work aims at and takes charge of identifying and removing obstacles and injustices that exist in society, helping mobilize both the individual/group and society to improve the well-being and develop opportunities for everyone in solving problems. The social work profession is based on the principle that each individual in society has inherent value and dignity. The relationship between the individual and society is complementary, and each individual has the potential to contribute to society in a meaningful way. The individual in turn, is entitled to live in a social environment that is healthy, respectful and supportive, and permits all persons to develop their full and unique potential. In working with its “client systems” whether it is the individual, family, group, community, or society, social work casts itself in the role of a partner, in a relationship in which the needs of the “client system” and its ultimate right to self-determination are the primary objectives [7, c.12].

The skills and abilities acquired by students in the learning process at the University are reflected in the implementation of students’ innovative social projects and provision of services on the basis of social service agencies, which is an important part of practical training of future social workers; the introduction of results of scientific research of undergraduate and graduate students in social service practices within the “University-Community” system of social work education, as developed on the basis of Lviv Polytechnic, the ongoing involvement of the faculty of the Department of Sociology and Social Work in the implementation and evaluation of local, national and international projects; building up partnerships between the community and the University both in practice and scientific research; the involvement of advanced international experiences; and the development of new social projects and services [9].

An important result of the constant, steady attention to the social environment and responding to the challenges and needs of the present, the integration of theory and practice is the establishment and development of innovative, community-based social services, which at the same time is a real response to the social demand to meet the needs of different groups of people. The development of these services is an essential part of the process of social change because it helps individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities use and develop existing sources of support, including their own personal resources and the resources of the existing network [1, c. 21].

The “University-Community” system of social work education developed at Lviv Polytechnic has largely influenced the University policy in the area of inclusive education aimed at the introduction and observance of international standards in this area. The major objectives defined by Lviv Polytechnic in inclusive education are: to ensure the rights of people with disabilities and their equal access to higher education; to promote the development and implementation of educational programs based on the value-oriented and human-centered approach; and to support students with disabilities in having their learning and other vital needs met.

The implementation of inclusive education policy at Lviv Polytechnic is illustrated by “No Limits” Services of Accessibility to Learning Opportunities (hereafter, “No Limits” Accessibility Services) being developed on the basis of the social model of inclusion – “Adjust the Environment, but Not the Person!”), with separate levels of influence of which in their close relationship on the disabled person to ensure that the person’s needs are addressed, and taking into account the ecosystem approach, shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. The social model of inclusion – “Adjust the Environment, but Not the Person!”

“No Limits” Accessibility Services are designed to provide ongoing support of the learning process of students with special needs, who require special conditions for receiving educational services, in accordance with *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* adopted by the UN on September 25, 2015, and *Sustainable Development Goal 4 Education 2030*, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” [10, 11]. Therefore “No Limits” Accessibility Services aim to ensure continuous support of the educational process of students with disabilities, who require special conditions for receiving educational services, and the development of inclusive consciousness, particularly the understanding of the challenging character of the existence of people with disabilities in the educational environment.

On the way of achieving the above goal, the main objectives of “No Limits” Accessibility Services are defined as follows: to gradually transform Lviv Polytechnic National University into the barrier free educational space with real access to learning opportunities for people with disabilities; to intensify research and development in order to meet the needs of persons with disabilities; to carry out ongoing support of students with disabilities; to identify and assess the University resources; to ensure linking with the external environment (including employers) on a regular basis; to establish and maintain close partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, associations, foundations and missions, including international representations, which study, apply and disseminate

advanced international experiences of professional practice in the field of social inclusion, inclusive education in particular; to disseminate information about the opportunities for higher education for people with disabilities, including available resources and services being developed at the University, and involve the community in solving problems of each disabled student.

The theoretical and methodological foundations of “No Limits” Accessibility Services are defined by the concept of social inclusion, based on the observation of fundamental rights and freedoms of a human being and the approval of social equality. In the context of the inclusive education policy implementation at Lviv Polytechnic, a system to provide inclusive educational services is being developed, as graphically shown in Fig. 2.

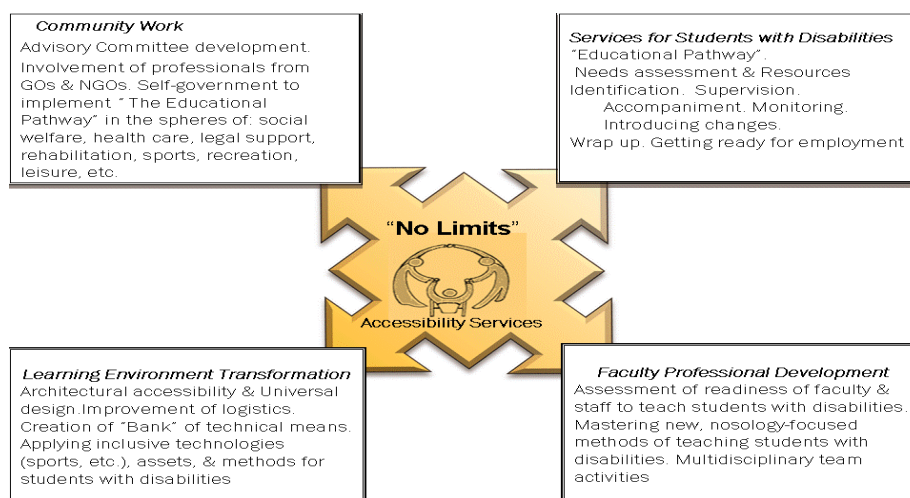


Fig 2. The Lviv Polytechnic system of providing inclusive educational services

One of the important aspects of “No Limits” Accessibility Services is the use of information technology as a means of implementation of inclusive education policy and a direct tool of inclusion of people with special needs (primarily those who are forced to overcome a variety of obstacles, including architectural barriers). The intensive growth in globalization rates, the steady development of the scientific and technological potential of society, the transition from a medical to a social model of disability, and the increased use of information technology have caused the objective process of penetration of information technology into all spheres of human activities. In the modern world, it is important to have access to technologies of information society, which are becoming an integral and vital part of everyday life. Means of information are more and more intensively integrated into the educational process, at a higher school in particular, while exercising an important influence on a human being, community and society, and giving rise to new approaches and paradigms in the perception of people with disabilities. The graphic representation of the levels of impact of

information technology on the disabled person as a means of inclusion is provided in Fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Information technology as a means of inclusion

Technological advances, the development of information technology in particular, have influenced the creation of new opportunities for people with disabilities. Thus, *at the micro level*, the individual access to information technology is a powerful tool for overcoming social exclusion, irrespective of the disability features and genesis. In particular, it is primarily due to modern techniques of text increasing/selecting, text scoring in digital format, using printers in Braille and applying other methods alike that people with visual impairments or the blind are exploring scientific literature, textbooks, manuals, journalism, fiction, and periodicals, this way getting actual access to modern education. In many schools around the world, access to online education is the demand of the time. Social networking, creating interest groups and self-help groups are changing self-perception and self-awareness of people with disabilities, expanding their capabilities and interaction spectra.

The advance of innovative information technologies in academic environment is an indicator of *the mezzo level*, i.e., the academic environment transformation level, and is caused by the development of educational services and the requirements put forward by students with disabilities as consumers of educational services. The academic environment is transformed in the following areas: physical access (to buildings, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, reading rooms, equipment, etc.); access to information (e.g., availability of digital audio- and video formats, adapted tactile-, audio- and video terminals, friendly integrated technologies, and Internet availability); and intellectual access (to the content of lectures, practical assignments and guidelines to perform practical and laboratory work).

The academic community has to become the environment where: the social inclusion of persons with disabilities is prevailing, the involvement of these people in determining their own needs and aspirations is taking place; positive planning of educational services is done in response to the consumers' needs; there is ongoing scientific research and technological development; services are offered/located wherever they are needed, and there is available place for them; the possibility of

providing services in cooperation with other community-based organizations of all forms of ownership is considered; and the provision of mobile services is ensured.

In the era of globalization, the impact of information technology at the social level, i.e., *at the macro level*, is aimed at changing the social paradigm in the treatment of people with disabilities, forming a new social and political culture, and developing inclusive society. The processes of globalization have noticeably intensified worldwide community organizations and movements and turned them into significant subjects of planetary policy, alongside with transnational corporations. As a result, while using information technology, global society can make quick and effective changes in attitudes towards people with disabilities as equal partners [2].

Conclusion

The establishment of “No Limits” Accessibility Services at Lviv Polytechnic National University is aimed at ensuring the observation of the rights of persons with disabilities and their equal access to learning opportunities and higher education, which will contribute to their maximum functional independence and success in life. Application of advanced educational technologies, and integration of community, health care and sports resources will allow students with special educational needs, and thereafter graduates to become competitive in the labour market. The activities of “No Limits” Accessibility Services will contribute to ensuring compliance of the system of inclusive educational services being developed on the basis of Lviv Polytechnic with international educational and social standards.

Further implementation of the inclusive education policy at Lviv Polytechnic National University will be supported by: search for and study of advanced global strategies, technologies and practices enabling students with disabilities to become highly qualified professionals, independent and successful people; application of advanced global strategies, technologies and expertise in improving the existing and developing and implementing new educational programs to support students with disabilities; and dissemination of acquired innovative strategies, technologies and expertise supporting students with disabilities among other higher educational establishments and organizations of Ukraine.

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